

Post Code Lottery - Access and Equity to Abortions in Queensland

North Queensland Combined Womens Services believes:

- that the Abortion laws are unclear to most people,
- that doctors are reluctant to become involved in abortion,
- that the availability of abortion services is limited.

There is no data collection on abortion in Queensland, but it's estimated that only around 1% of the state's approximate 14,000 abortions each year take place in public hospitals. The remainder are provided by specialist private day surgeries – of which there is one in Townsville. These services are high quality but the cost can be a high barrier to access for some women. Medication abortion through a GP generally has an out of pocket cost of between \$250 and \$400 depending on the provider, and a surgical procedure can cost into the thousands of dollars depending on a woman's location and the gestation of her pregnancy.

Women in rural and regional areas of the state often face long travel distances and additional costs for accommodation on top of higher procedural costs, as well as having to take time off work and arrange for care of children or family members. It's not uncommon for a first trimester surgical abortion to cost a woman from rural or regional Queensland in excess of \$2000 with all these things taken into account.

Women pregnant after sexual assault, those with serious health conditions, those experiencing severe violence, and women who are homeless, are regularly turned away from Queensland public hospitals when requesting abortion.

Information on abortion services and legality can be hard to find, and GPs and other health professionals are under no obligation to refer women onwards if they themselves are personally opposed to abortion.

In short, the state of access currently means that women living in metropolitan areas who are financially well resourced and can find the information they need are generally able to have an abortion in Queensland.

Women living in poverty, or those in rural or remote areas of the state, younger women, those with little access to social or financial support, and those living with violence, are finding it increasingly difficult to access services, and for a growing number it is just too hard.

Abortion access should not be a postcode lottery. Women deserve equal access to health services no matter where they live or how much money they earn.

The objectives should be to ensure safe, equitable, accessible and legal abortion for all Queensland women, and to institutionalise women's autonomy over reproductive decision-making.

In order to achieve this, abortion policy should aim to shape improvements to women's reproductive health services and to impact positively on the status of women, by including:

- Quality sexual and reproductive health services, including abortion, as core components of the Queensland health care system
- Access to the full range of reproductive health services, including abortion, regardless of women's geographical location
- Planning and provision of abortion services within a woman-centred care model that recognises and respects the rights of women to control their reproductive lives and to make decisions that are based on their personal knowledge and experiences
- Access to accurate and unbiased information to facilitate women making informed decisions
- The removal of barriers to timely provision of services to improve safety of outcomes for women
- Supportive non-compulsory counselling where requested
- Trained and properly equipped health service providers, working within guidelines of best-practice standards of care
- A Statewide sexual and reproductive health policy geared to achieving positive health outcomes for women, including provision of good-quality family planning information and services to meet the diverse needs of groups of women, including adolescents, survivors of sexual assault and HIV-infected women

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